

# Combating Gangs, Building Hope

## **PROJECT VISION and Other Programs Offered Positive Alternatives; Tough Enforcement Actions Took Violent Gang Members Off the Streets**

Conditions outside were blustery and cold, but the optimism inside New Brunswick's Lincoln Avenue School Annex provided a warm counterpoint. The date was December 20, 2004, and Attorney General Peter C. Harvey was gathered with students, parents, educators, members of law enforcement and others at the city's Lincoln Avenue School to announce a new anti-gang and violence prevention initiative — PROJECT VISION.

A partnership combining the energy and resources of the New Jersey Attorney General's Office, participating county prosecutors and a host of community stakeholders, PROJECT VISION is designed to give thousands of New Jersey youngsters a safe place to go after school, and a range of positive, informative, and, most of all, fun activities to engage them.

In New Brunswick, nearly 100 students had signed up for the PROJECT VISION program as of its December 2004 kick-off. Even as the new program was being rolled out for the first time in Middlesex County, similar PROJECT VISION programs were be-



*A Perth Amboy Police Officer plays kickball with children during a typical day in the life of the city's OAG-funded Police/Community Partnership program. The program offers young people an after-school "safe haven" in which to work, play, and interact with adult role models.*

ing finalized for launch in 2005 in Glassboro (Gloucester county), Bridgeton (Cumberland county), Asbury Park (Ocean county), and Irvington, (Essex county). In each case, the programs were made possible by grants provided to county prosecutors' offices by the Division of Criminal Justice within the Attorney General's Office.

"PROJECT VISION offers young people a nurturing after-school environment, as well as positive alternatives to 'hanging out' on the streets," said Attorney General Harvey during the New Brunswick launch. "It can help us turn young people away from the false glamour of gang life... it can help us win the battle for our children."

With the successful roll-out of PROJECT VISION, New Jersey strengthened an already-effective campaign to make neighborhoods safer through a combination of innovative prevention strategies and tough enforcement actions.

In addition to Project Vision, a number of programs aimed at giving young people positive alternatives to the street continued

to thrive in 2003 and 2004.

In Perth Amboy, parents and civic leaders continued to laud a Police/Community Partnership Program — funded with a grant from the Division of Criminal Justice — that blended enhanced neighborhood police protection with the availability of an after-school "safe haven" site where young people can play and do homework.

In Newark, the Attorney General's Office continued working with local and county-level law enforcement, the faith-based community, non-profit agencies and others to create after school programs that gave young people a place to go, and a diversity of activities to engage them. Known as Newark Partners Against Crime, the effort expanded in 2004 to feature three individual "safe havens" within Newark's South Ward section. Each of these three safe havens offer participating youngsters cultural and social activities, educational programs, and athletic and recreational opportunities.

## Gangs, Guns and Drugs Video

Attorney General Harvey, who served as Chairman of the Gang Violence Subcommittee of the National Association of Attorneys General, also commissioned an effective public awareness video on gangs in 2004 for distribution to parents, educators, community groups and other stakeholders in the effort to combat gang activity. The gritty video demonstrates through compelling interviews and disturbing photographs that gang life is not glamorous — it is a road to prison, violent death and disfiguring or disabling injury. The video, which was quickly incorporated by other states (for example, Virginia, West Virginia and Wisconsin) into their law enforcement training initiatives, can be viewed on-line at [www.njgangfree.org](http://www.njgangfree.org).

## AG Chaired Philadelphia/Camden HIDTA

Attorney General Harvey served as Chairman of the Philadelphia-Camden High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force. The HIDTA Task Force is a cooperative state and federal initiative which targets heroin trafficking and its corresponding money-laundering activities in the Philadelphia-Camden metropolitan region. The HIDTA Task Force receives funding from the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and is staffed by personnel from various federal, state, county, and local law enforcement agencies.

## Gang Prosecutions

As part of the Attorney General's Gangs, Guns and Drugs initiative in 2003-2004, the State Police Gang Unit and the Division of Criminal Justice spearheaded major investigations that resulted in the arrest and prosecution of over 150 street gang members on a range of charges from conspiracy and criminal racketeering to drug trafficking, illegal weapons possession and money laundering.

Among the investigations were:

### ❖ Operation Golden Triangle —

Done in conjunction with Trenton police and the Mercer County Prosecutors Office, Operation Golden Triangle led to the arrest of 17 people involved with the alleged sale of heroin and other narcotics in the City of Trenton, surrounding Mercer county area, and throughout Essex county. Authorities confiscated 300 bricks of

heroin and several illegal weapons — including an Uzi submachine gun.

### ❖ Operation Lord Stanley —

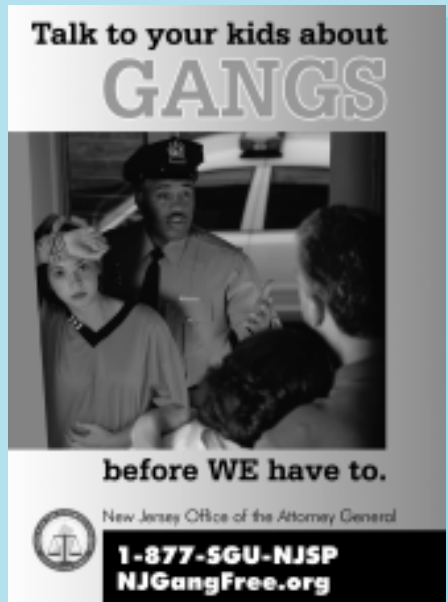
As a result of the efforts of State, local and county law enforcement, 10 suspected members of a "crack" cocaine and marijuana dealing network based at a public housing complex in Atlantic City were arrested. More than four pounds of cocaine were seized, as well as more than two pounds of marijuana, approximately \$200,000 cash and a variety of firearms and automobiles.

### ❖ 18th Street Gang —

Coordinated by the State Police Street Gang Unit, this investigation led to the indictment, conviction and imprisonment of several members of the so-called 18th Street Gang operating in New Brunswick in connection with street violence in the city. Three gang members received stiff State Prison sentences (five, seven and 12 years respectively) for their part in the attempted murder, via drive-by shooting, of rival gang members.

### ❖ Champagne Posse/Irvington Initiative —

Indicted were 65 alleged members of the so-called "Champagne Posse" in connection with marijuana sales, weapons possession and other illegal activities in and around Irvington. In addition, as part of the ongoing Irvington Initiative, members of the Essex County Anti-Crime Partnership kept the pressure on illegal gang activity by conducting sweeps in the spring and fall of 2004 in which they painted over gang graffiti and arrested a number of alleged gang members and associates.



*The Attorney General's Office has made combating gang activity a top priority. This public awareness poster (also printed in Spanish) offers an urgent message, as well as contact information for those who want to learn more.*

*PROJECT VISION is a new program aimed at reducing gang activity and violence by giving young people a range of positive, engaging alternatives to street life.*

